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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# CHALLENGES OF THE ANTI-TRUMP MOVEMENT

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**ABSTRACT:** This article explains the sudden and strong emergence of a movement in resistance to the presidency of Donald Trump as a counter-movement to the long-term “movementization” of the Republican Party in the wake of civil rights, the Nixon “southern strategy”, and the emergence of white nativism. It identifies the Resistance as posing three distinct challenges for both citizens and scholars of participation and conflict: the political opportunity challenge, the coalitional challenge, and the radicalization/ institutionalization challenge. The article situates the Resistance in a historical and comparative context, highlights its dilemmas as it faces the focal point of a populist/nativist President, and asks if it is an effective counter-movement to the white nativist movement that supports him.

**KEYWORDS:** Coalition formation, Movement/counter-movement interaction, Political Opportunities, Populism, Race.

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## 1. Introduction

The rapid emergence of what has come to be called “the Resistance” to Donald Trump startled both activists and academics in the United States. Perhaps its resilience and its impact on the electoral contest of November 2018 were even more striking. As Martha McKenna, a Democratic Party consultant wrote of the party’s wave of new, majority-female candidates who arose out of the anti-Trump resistance. These grass-roots candidates came out of non-political, non-traditional networks, meaning that they’re running very different kinds of campaigns than we’ve ever seen. When a state legislator runs for Congress, that’s a formula we know. But when a nurse or a mom or a young veteran decides to run, their campaign looks and feels different, and in 2018, there’s a lot of power in that.<sup>1</sup>

The diversity of the Resistance on many different issues has given citizens a cause for optimism, tempering their fear for the future of American democracy. But it has also faced scholars of social movements and contentious politics with a series of challenges. Among the most serious challenges are these:

- *The political opportunity challenge:* Election and Inauguration day protests against newly-elected leaders are now a routine part of life, but the election of Donald Trump generated a cycle of contention comparable to the one that Americans experienced during the period of Civil Rights and the movement against Vietnam War.<sup>2</sup> Was this the result of the threat of Trumpism or the opportunity his election offered for the revival of a progressive movement that had lain dormant for decades?
- *The coalitional challenge:* In the Resistance against the Trump presidency we see both cooperation among different groups and dispersion around diverse goals. Most notably, some people turned out to protect the institutions of liberal democracy while others wanted to tear down the institutions that produced the Trump presiden-

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<sup>1</sup> Elena Schneider, “Something Has Actually Changed; Women, Minorities, First-Time Candidates Drive Democratic House Hopes, *Politico*, September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2018 retrieved at <https://www.politico.com/story/2018/09/11/white-men-democratic-house-candidates-813717>

<sup>2</sup> Whether this movement will extend over the same long period of time as its forebears remains to be seen. In July 2018, Erica Chenoweth and Jeremy Pressman found that between 71,502 and 73,483 people showed up at political events, the lowest that their crowd-sourced estimates found since December 2017. See Chenoweth and Pressman’s “In July the Trump-era Wave of Protests Started Taking a back Seat to Campaign Rallies,” retrieved at <https://washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp2018/10/19/in-july-the-trump-era-wave-of-protests-started-taking-a-back-seat-to-campaign/rallies/>

cy. In this internal dialectic, which tendency is most likely to win out – conflict over goals and means or unity around the focal point of a common enemy?

- *The radicalization/institutionalization challenge*: Related to this, as those who want to protect the institutions of democracy gravitate into the party system, will those whose goal was to tear down these institutions move into anti-systemic postures in a mutual dance of radicalization with Trump's more extreme supporters? Does radicalization on the Left advance the cause of defending democracy or does it trigger an even more potent movement of nativism on the political Right?

In what follows, we will focus most closely on these three challenges. But first, we must place both Trump and the Resistance in historical and comparative perspective. We will argue that Trumpism can only be understood in the light of "movementization" inside the American party system over the past half century and its relation to race. This sets it off from most European right-populist parties that have emerged outside of the institutional party system<sup>3</sup> and provides it with reserves of power and organization that most of these parties lack. This leaves the anti-Trump movement with political opportunities, but also with major challenges.

## 2. Populism with a difference

The election of Donald Trump in November 2016 led to a paradox: as Europeans well know – but Americans often forget -- a democratic election can lead to a threat to the constitutional order from *within* that order. To understand how this has happened, we must overcome two opposite temptations: the first is to see Trump as something *sui generis*; and the second, to see the movement he represents as no more than an American version of recent trends in Europe. Our approach leads us to look both comparatively at other cases of rightwing populism and at the relationship between movement activism and electoral politics in America's recent history. Drawing on our co-edited book - *The Resistance* (2018) - and especially on the contributions of Doug McAdam and Kenneth Roberts to that book,<sup>4</sup> we look both at recent developments in Europe and at the key role of race in shaping both America's political polarization and Trump's victory. We see the anti-Trump Resistance as a *counter*-movement – not unlike the ones that one of us – with Suzanne Staggenborg – analyzed in the recent American past

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<sup>3</sup> The rise of Victor Orban in Hungary and of Jaroslaw Kaczynski in Poland are obvious exceptions.

<sup>4</sup> In addition to their contributions to *The Resistance*, see Roberts (2017) and McAdam and Kloos (2014).

(Meyer and Staggenborg 1996).<sup>5</sup> As such, it is both tied to the erratic moves of its antagonist and is able to employ the remarkable diversity of the resources it commands. We also see it as a compound movement, unified in its focus on the outsize figure of Donald Trump but scattered in its goals and its composition.

### **2.1 Like Europe but not Europe**

As numerous observers have pointed out, in recent years, Europe has experienced an extraordinary wave of populism, brought on by the Great Recession, by the austerity policies that governments produced in response to it, and by the wave of refugees that followed. In Hungary, Poland, Germany and – in different forms – in Italy, Austria, and Britain, nativist currents and populist parties have threatened – and in some cases overwhelmed – the liberal consensus that dominated European politics through the turn of the new century (Roberts 2018).

But while Trumpism shows striking similarities to rightwing populist parties in Europe, as Roberts writes, most of the movements that gave rise to those parties arose *outside of*, and in competition with the mainstream party system. What sets the United States apart, at least in comparison with its long-standing democratic counterparts in Europe, is what Roberts sees as:

- (1) The steady infusion of varied right-wing social movements into a mainstream conservative party, rather than a smaller far-right ethno-nationalist “niche” party, and
- (2) The *de facto* transformation of that mainstream party into a vehicle for the election of an antiestablishment outsider who is openly contemptuous of democratic norms and procedures (Roberts 2018, 54).

The insertion of Trump’s movement into the institutional party system of a robust democracy has both given the Republican Party unusual opportunities and faced it with difficult problems. The opportunities arise from the fact that Trump inherited, and has been able to exploit, an existing panoply of support organizations and a political class that became a willing executioner of most of his policies. The problems arise from that fact that most Republican officials – though firmly planted on the right – are more con-

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<sup>5</sup> Note that we use the term as it has been employed in the social movement literature summarized in Meyer and Staggenborg (1996), and not in the Polanyian sense of a historical counter-trend to market economics.

ventional conservatives, and that each of his outrageous moves – while delighting his populist base—has triggered a counter-movement against him and his administration.

While the two wings of the Trumpian coalition - nationalist and conservative - came together easily over tax cuts for the very wealthy, they divided over a number of other issues, like health care, immigration, Trump's would-be Russian alliance and his dalliance with the Saudi monarchy, international trade and (more quietly) his injudicious attacks on women, minorities and the press. In the face of the new president's constant stream of initiatives and outrages, it was only the ferocity and loyalty of his movement base that kept congressional Republicans in line – as several who had opposed him learned at the cost of their political futures.

The 2018 midterm elections revealed both the opportunities and the costs to the Republicans of the Trumpian presidency. While the GOP held onto the Senate – indeed, increasing its majority in the upper chamber – it lost control of the House of Representatives, largely due to anti-Trump sentiments. The Republicans gained two seats in the Senate, and will govern that house with a thin majority, while the Democrats gained 40 seats in the House of Representatives, and will control it with a comfortable majority.<sup>6</sup> While the Republicans continue to run the majority of state governments, the Democrats won the governors' seats in seven states, including Kansas, historically a very conservative state, and took control of six state legislatures.<sup>7</sup> State-level gains will be especially important when it comes to redistricting after the 2020 census, in which the state legislature gets to decide on changes in district lines, a power that the Republicans used to their advantage to gerrymander the electorate after the 2010 election.

While the election was a testament to organizing against the Trump presidency, and the Democrats won substantial gains, it was hardly an unambiguous rebuke of the president. The defeated Republicans were almost all among the most moderate members of the House caucus, many of whom had modestly resisted some of the administration's policy initiatives in deference to their constituents. The remaining Republican contingent in the House is a bit smaller, but is substantially more unified in deference to the president. In the Senate, it will be somewhat more extreme. Two mild Republican critics of the Trump administration retired rather than face committed Trumpian primary voters. At least three of the new Republican senators are far more committed to Trump personally and politically than the moderate Democrats they replaced in Indiana, Missouri, and North Dakota. The slightly expanded majority will weaken the

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.google.com/search?q=election+results&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8&hl=en-us&client=safari>.

<sup>7</sup> On the governor's races, see <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/11/06/us/elections/results-governor-elections.html>. For the state legislative results, see <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2018/11/7/18071410/democrat-state-legislature-colorado-minnesota-election-results>

leverage of the most moderate remaining Republicans, Susan Collins (Maine) and Lisa Murkowski (Alaska), who had frustrated efforts to repeal the Affordable Care Act. The Senate now has a working majority of Trump acolytes.

The election realigned the institutional battles and political realities in Washington, all in ways that strengthened the influence of movement partisans in each party. Democrats, who gained control of the House, will be under pressure from the grassroots to challenge the administration aggressively on matters of policy and ethics. Meanwhile, the election demonstrated the futility for Republicans in trying to keep a political distance from the president; moderates who criticized the president lost their seats. Republican politicians learned that Trump's blessing was powerful within the base of the Party, and was essential for winning office in large swaths of the United States.

Trumpism was weakened but not defeated. What needs to be explained, then, is how a phenomenon that is common to the long-standing democracies of Europe stands out from its European counterparts, and has been shaped by America's institutions and patterns of contentious politics in general. It is only against the background of these differences that we can understand the emergence, the extraordinary vitality, and the complex problems faced by the anti-Trump Resistance.

### **3. Race and Movementization**

Two factors seem to us to be central in understanding the Trumpian phenomenon: race and the partial movementization of the party system over the past few decades. These two features are often treated as if they were distinct compartments in American politics, but in fact they have been deeply imbricated with one another since the 1950s (McAdam and Kloos 2014, ch. 3). Although there are striking parallels with the rise of anti-immigrant populism in Europe, race is – if anything – more deeply embedded in American politics, and the rise of movement politics coming out of the civil rights movement and the opposition to it provided it with a new and more polarizing edge.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the Civil Rights movement reached wide public visibility, setting an agenda for mainstream politics for the next few decades. Like the current Resistance, it featured both institutional and non-institutional facets; the first when the NAACP launched a legal campaign to end school segregation in the 1950s, and the second when a group of college students launched the sit-in movement that spread across the South in the early 1960s. Though it found grudging support from the Kennedy administration, the movement operated independently of the Democratic Party, and – in

fact – in its early days it enjoyed more congressional support from the Republicans than from the Democratic Party, which included a powerful southern segregationist wing.<sup>8</sup>

Though much of the historical literature has focused on the successes of the freedom movement, we must not forget that the movement triggered a countermovement of segregationists – some of them quite violent – and led to the broader “Southern strategy” of the Republican Party in national politics (Phillips 1969). Although the overt aim of that strategy was to encourage white southerners to shift allegiance to the Republicans, the adjective “southern” is partly a misnomer, because Richard Nixon, who first successfully executed the strategy, exploited and promoted white racial resentment throughout the country. Nixon’s 1968 campaign, for example, exploited the fear of white Americans of the riots that tore apart many of the nation’s northern cities in the summers of 1965-67 and following the 1968 murder of Martin Luther King Jr.

Race lay at the crossroads of both the southern and law-and-order facets of Nixon’s strategy, one that ambitious Republican politicians hastened to adopt. To this brew, President Ronald Reagan added a potent anti-government element, focusing on the supposed advantages that African-Americans and other minorities have gained at the expense of tax-paying middle-class white voters. The Trump movement has equally used race to cross regional lines in its call to “make America great again.” For example, during the first year of Trump’s presidency, confederate flags began to appear on people’s lawns in rural areas throughout the North.<sup>9</sup>

This familiar story has often been retold by political party specialists in the United States, but, in their emphasis on elections, they have mainly overlooked a fundamental factor:<sup>10</sup> In both the Democratic and the Republican parties, these developments were part of a broader “movementization” within the parties’ bases which laid the groundwork for the current polarization of American politics. As McAdam and Kloos put it:

By revitalizing and legitimating the social movement form, the civil rights movement of the early 1960s reintroduced...centrifugal pressures to American

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<sup>8</sup> For example, as McAdam and Kloos point out (2014, 79), 107 House Democrats and 18 Senate Democrats voted against the Civil Rights act of 1957, compared to only 19 House Republicans and none in the Senate.

<sup>9</sup> See Frances S. Sellers, “Confederate Pride and Prejudice,” *Washington Post*, October 22, 2018.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/national/wp/2018/10/22/feature/some-white-northerners-want-to-redefine-a-flag-rooted-in-racism-as-a-symbol-of-patriotism/>.

<sup>10</sup> Important exceptions are the books of Daniel Schlozman (2015) and Samuel Rosenfeld (2018).

politics. Or more accurately, it was one movement – civil rights – and one powerful countermovement—white resistance...that began to force the parties to weigh the costs and benefits of appealing to the median voter against the strategic imperative of responding to mobilized movement elements at the ideological margins (2014, 10-11).

But it wasn't only the social movement revival in the 1960s that mattered. Critically, the post-Watergate campaign reforms of the 1970s, which limited the influence of party elites on their own nomination processes, made the support of mobilized citizen groups far more critical than they had been in the past (Berry 2000). From the ill-fated McGovern nomination in the 1972 presidential election to the infiltration of the Tea Party into the Republican congressional delegation after Barack Obama's election in 2008, mobilized minorities played a critical role in the nomination process and – because they are typically more extreme than the average party member - in the polarization of the two major parties.

But although both parties passed parallel primary reforms, there was a difference in how they responded to this growing grassroots mobilization and polarization. While the Democrats remained a coalition of interest groups, the Republicans were drawn together by an increasingly focused conservative ideology (Grossman and Hopkins 2016). This asymmetry meant that while the Democrats continued to have to build alliances across interest group lines - and were often hampered by the inter-group tensions in their coalition - the Republicans relied increasingly on resentment to government in general and to those who benefited from government initiatives in particular. This included both domestic minorities, suspected of taking advantage of government largesse, and, increasingly, immigrants, Latinos, and Muslims. Given this ideological coloration, militant groups had a greater chance of taking over the Republican Party than the corresponding movement in the more diverse and group-centered Democratic Party – which is what happened in the run-up to the 2016 presidential election, when Trump drew on these militant minorities to defeat a dozen more conventional Republican candidates.

This transformation took a long time to become evident. The developing Republican coalition had to balance the concerns of culturally-conservative working class whites with the class interests of large business and the ideological priorities of smaller but prolific libertarian and neoconservative contingents. This was difficult to accomplish; from the first stirrings of the religious right in the 1970s, the party generally prioritized the class interests of business, offering rhetorical concessions—coupled with judicial appointments—to the cultural conservatives, adopting hawkish foreign policies, and



largely taking the support of libertarians for granted. In contrast, the Democrats' coalition was always more unstable, complicated, varied, and therefore more contingent. That party's electoral success depended upon constantly renegotiating alliances in different parts of the country and in the vacillating turnout of lower-class and minority voters during a period in which the union movement was in decline. In areas where organized labor maintained some sway, it was a critical component of electoral campaigns. Black, Latino, and Asian ethnic contingents stepped in for the old white ethnic constituencies of earlier days in other areas of the country. Issue specialists concerned with such matters as reproductive rights, environmental protection, or civil liberties and criminal justice reform were substantial contingents in some places, along with a smattering of ideological liberals virtually everywhere. As the Republican Party moved rightward, the Democrats also competed effectively in many places on the promise of effective technocratic administration. The potential of a broad alliance consistently loomed on the horizon, but achieving and sustaining it was always a work in progress.

Barack Obama's election in 2008 did demonstrate that such a broad and diverse Democratic interest group coalition could succeed, but it also increased the potency of the anti-state, anti-Black ideology in the Republican Party. In addition to reviving the race issue among Republicans, Obama's victory produced an ambitious Affordable Care Act, which brought out older white voters enraged at the prospect of a government "takeover" of health care. The Obama Administration also took an explicitly activist approach to social and economic policy, presiding over new consumer protections, increased regulation of the financial sector and, to varying degrees, support for women, and ethnic, racial, and sexual minorities.

The faces of the Democratic leadership reflected these policies: in overseeing financial reform, for example, President Obama worked with Nancy Pelosi, the first woman to serve as Speaker of the House, and Representative Barney Frank, openly Jewish, gay, and chair of the House Financial Services Committee. Obama also appointed record numbers of women and minorities to visible positions, a fact that did not escape the attention of white Republican voters and their representatives, and eventually came around to supporting same-sex marriage, the most visible success of a social movement in America since the civil rights movement (Dorf and Tarrow 2014).

Beginning in 2010, the Tea Party rebellion, followed by its insertion into the Republican Party, carried both traditional economic conservative and white populist messages and was unified by opposition to the new president and his race (Skocpol and Williamson 2011; Parker and Barreto 2013). Even before Trump entered the scene, Republicans found that they could benefit from the mobilized anger of white voters driven by

racial resentment<sup>11</sup> who had deep differences with the government in Washington. The Republican Party began to play to a populist undercurrent that would prove dangerous, first to Democrats, then to mainstream Republicans, and ultimately to democracy itself.

It was that undercurrent that Trump was able to exploit — first, in his transparently fictional but frequently repeated claim that Obama was born in Kenya, then in his attacks on Mexicans and Muslims, and finally on his assaults on the press and on truth itself. We will examine the institutionalization of movement politics below, but it needs to be emphasized that Trump's major weapon against both the Republican elite and the Democrats is, at this writing, his unshakable movement base and its personal connection to its charismatic leader.

#### **4. Movement/Counter-movement Interaction**

This was a deeper connection than anyone imagined when Trump, in June, 2015, announced his ambition to run for the presidency. This does not mean that all of Trump's voters had similar policy and political profiles: on the contrary, as Emily Ekins (2017) shows in her analysis of a massive Democracy Fund survey, there were at least five distinguishable sectors of the Trump constituency: what she calls "staunch conservatives," "free marketeers," "American preservationists," "anti-elites," and "the disengaged." Each group had somewhat different motives for supporting the Trump movement and a different degree of loyalty to its leader.<sup>12</sup> But at the core of his constituency were many voters whose fealty to Trump was orthogonal to these policy and political profiles, involving a personal connection that was reminiscent of European populist traditions.

This core of Trump's support is "cult-like". For example, Mark Lee, who appeared on a CNN panel in the midst of the Mueller investigation into campaign collusion with the Russians, declared; "If Jesus Christ gets down off the cross and told me Trump is with Russia, I would tell him, 'Hold on a second. I need to check with the president if it's

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<sup>11</sup> See Abramowitz and Webster (2015) and Abramowitz (2017).

<sup>12</sup> Ekins (2017). The report is summarized in Karlyn Bowman, "Who Were Donald Trump's Voters? Now We Know," *Forbes Opinion*, June 23, 2017. [www.forbes.com/sites/bowmanmarsico/2017/06/23/who-were-trumps-voters-now-we-know/2/#16caae4e2d08](http://www.forbes.com/sites/bowmanmarsico/2017/06/23/who-were-trumps-voters-now-we-know/2/#16caae4e2d08).

true’.”<sup>13</sup> Although not every supporter was as devotedly loyal to Trump as Lee, a cult-like personal loyalty seems to have infected a large part of the Republican base, making it impermeable to rational argument. As outgoing Republican Senator Bob Corker complained, “We’re in a strange place. It’s becoming a cultish thing, isn’t it?” “It’s not a good place for any party to have a cult-like situation as it relates to a President that happens to be purportedly of the same party.”<sup>14</sup>

The depth of Trump’s “cult-like” support was revealed when, in June, 2018, his administration’s new “zero tolerance” policy toward refugees from Central America emerged. As is well-known, that policy led to the forced separation of parents and children at the border and to the incarceration of many of the children, including even infants, in scattered detention sites around the country. While Democrats, Republicans, civil liberties groups, medical associations, and religious leaders were appalled at the policy, Trump’s loyal supporters continued to support it. As measured by the Gallup daily presidential approval tracking poll in June, 2018, Trump averaged 87 percent job approval from Republicans in his second year in office. While he was under severe criticism for his family separation policy, his approval rating rose to 90 percent among Republicans.<sup>15</sup>

This was not the first time a movement-like following has infiltrated a major American party. Going back to the Civil War, when abolitionists combined with “free-soil” advocates to create the Republican Party of Lincoln, American parties have long been vulnerable to movementization. Part of the reason for this is their extreme decentralization and weak central direction, while another is the fact that the electoral system affords few opportunities for third parties to flourish. As a result, movements that would create an independent party in Europe’s multiparty systems are virtually forced to enter the two-party system (Rosenstone, Behr, and Lazarus, 1996). If there is something different about the Trumpian movement, it is that it represents a challenge to the norms and institutions of a pluralist democracy, one that offers eerie echoes of historical authoritarian movements and regimes, both in the United States and abroad (Roberts 2018; Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018).

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<sup>13</sup> Avery Anapol, “Trump voter: If Jesus Christ told me Trump colluded with Russia, I’d check with Trump,” *The Hill*, November 21st., 2017. <http://thehill.com/homenews/administration/361158-trump-voter-if-jesus-christ-told-me-trump-colluded-with-russia-id>

<sup>14</sup> “Read the Executive Order Trump Signed on Family Separation,” *New York Times*, June 20, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/20/us/politics/read-executive-order-trump-family-separation.html>.

<sup>15</sup> Jeremy W. Peters, “As Critics Assail President, His Supporters Tighten their Embrace,” *New York Times*, June 24, 2018, p. 19. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/23/us/politics/republican-voters-trump.html>.

In his historical study, *American Demagogues* (1954), Reinhart Luthin offered a list of characteristics that he found in the public careers of American demagogues of the last century -- those "masters of the masses" who, in their aspirations for political place and power, pandered to the passions and prejudices, rather than the reason, of the populace, and performed all manner of crowd-captivating tricks, only to betray the people who had supported them. Luthin did not compare his list of American demagogues with those of other countries; but there are striking similarities between figures like Benito Mussolini and the behavior of Donald Trump in his first period in office (Tarrow 2018).

The ideological cast of the Republican Party is not identical to the beliefs -- such as they are -- of Donald Trump. Indeed, he has few fully-developed ideological positions and is capable of taking opposing policy positions from one day to the next. But his election gave the Republican right - and especially its former Tea Party faction, now renamed "the Freedom Caucus" - the opportunity to pass the anti-regulatory legislation its members had long advocated and to remain silent as Trump began to erode the administrative state and pack the courts with right-wing lawyers. It also gave them license to ignore the assaults that democracy was facing at the hands of the new administration. A few Republicans -- mainly those who had decided to leave office -- and many civil servants warned publicly about the new administration's outrages. But most -- terrified by the expected revenge of the President and his devoted movement base - suppressed whatever doubts they had about the costs of his policies.

#### **4.1 The Resistance Countermovement<sup>16</sup>**

If Donald Trump can be usefully seen as a movement leader who mobilized a mass following with charismatic appeals, this means that the Resistance that opposes him operates as a countermovement. A countermovement we define, simply, as "a movement that makes contrary claims simultaneously to those of the original movement."<sup>17</sup> This puts the emphasis on interaction between movement and countermovement. As Meyer and Staggenborg write:

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<sup>16</sup> This section draws on the substantive chapters in our co-edited book, *The Resistance* (2018). For greater detail and more examples, the reader is directed to that book, and in particular to the chapters on the women's movement by Berry and Chenoweth (2018), on immigrant and Latino mobilization by Zepeda Millán and Wallace (2018), on the climate change movement by Fisher (2018), on the lawyers' movement by Dorf and Chu (2018), and on the Indivisible movement by Brooker (2018) and Han and Oyakawa (2018).

<sup>17</sup> Earlier authors regarded countermovements as essentially reactionary and directed more at state and society than at the precursor movement, and indeed, the most important work on countermovements in

Movements ...have a “demonstration effect” for political countermovements –showing that collective action can effect (or resist) change in particular aspects of society. Movements thus create their own opposition, which sometimes takes countermovement form. Once a countermovement is mobilized, movement and countermovement react to one another (1996, 1632).

Meyer and Staggenborg list three conditions that promote the rise of counter-movements:

- first, that the movement [it opposes] shows signs of success;
- second, that the interests of some populations are threatened by movement goals;
- and, third, that political allies are available to aid oppositional mobilization.

All three of these claims apply to the current situation in the United States: Trump has been remarkably successful in holding onto a solid phalanx of his 2016 supporters; his policies seriously threaten a number of population groups; and the countermovement has been able to attract the support of a number of political allies. Whatever emerges from the “Resistance” – and we will only know this during the second half of Trump’s term in office -- the United States is in the middle of a major cycle of contention, with alliances between proximate groups, seeking and creating political opportunities, and intersecting institutional and non-institutional facets (Tarrow 2011; 2018). The reciprocal relationship between the Trumpian movement and the countermovement that opposes him both offers the Resistance political opportunities but also leaves it susceptible to major risks.

Both opportunities and risks expand in periods of generalized disruption, which is what the Trump presidency has produced. In order to better understand the interaction between the Resistance countermovement and the movement it has been created to oppose, in the next three sections, we will lay out the challenges we outlined in our introduction: the political opportunity challenge, the coalitional challenge, and the radicalization/institutionalization challenge. Drawing on the contributions to our co-edited

the United States is about conservative movements. But more recently, many authors have argued that a countermovement can be either progressive or reactionary, and that its defining characteristic is that it is “dynamically engaged with and related to an oppositional movement.” This chapter adopts the latter view.

book, *The Resistance*, as well as from our own thinking, we will touch on all three of these challenges.

## **5. The political opportunity challenge**

The mobilization of citizens is contingent upon perceptions of opportunities — the assessment of the likelihood that collective action could achieve desired results or stave off unwanted outcomes. Organizers, overly optimistic by disposition (Gamson and Meyer 1996), often overstate threats and political prospects, hoping to convince others to join in their efforts. In doing so, they engage the political imagination and moral courage of their audiences, but they also risk wasting efforts and ultimately fostering disappointment and disaffection. Opportunities are the reverse side of threats (Goldstone and Tilly 2001), both of which can entice a movement to form. The conjuncture of political opportunities, perceived and material, present difficult challenges to both the Trump administration and its Resistance challengers, challenges that each side has, with difficulty, tried to navigate. We can't really understand these challenges without recognizing the political structures established in the American Constitution centuries ago.

### **5.1 A System of Veto Points**

Wary of monarchical tyranny, and frightened of mass democracy, the American founders negotiated the creation of a set of governmental structures that would invite political engagement, but would also make concerted government action time-consuming and difficult to achieve. A large republic governed by both state and federal authorities, with powers divided across both levels of government and distinct political institutions at the federal level, makes it relatively easy for movements to find sites in which to mobilize, but very difficult for them to win effective control of the levers of policy making. Both the Trump contingent and its organized Resistance have faced the built-in veto points of American politics (Tsebelis 2002).

Trump's electoral campaign displayed proud ignorance of the institutional and legal obstacles facing the reforms he promised that only he could deliver. Even before taking office, his administration struggled to develop plans to make good on new policies on health care, immigration, and infrastructure investment. The signature promise of a ban on Muslims entering the United States encountered legal obstacles the Admin-

istration was ill-prepared to navigate, and triggered immediate resistance. Haphazardly implemented, the Trump plan faced citizen protest at the airports, a raft of legal challenges, and an unusual flood of lawyers volunteering their time to help people caught in transit (Dorf and Chu 2018). Although a travel ban was ultimately narrowly upheld by the Supreme Court more than a year after its appearance, that ban reflected rounds of revisions, qualifications, and attenuations.

Although Trump has frequently bragged about his administration's "amazing" successes, most of his campaign promises were either defeated or fell by the wayside. For example, his promise to repeal the Affordable Care Act, a core issue for Republicans for nearly a decade, faltered in the Senate, and by the time of the 2018 midterms, Republican candidates were falling over themselves to declare their commitment to support for funding for pre-existing conditions. At the same time, meaningful international agreements on security or trade proved easier to criticize than to negotiate. Promised cuts in federal spending were scuttled on the shores of Congressional concerns with electoral constituents—and math. As for Trump's campaign promises to afford working mothers help to pay for day care and cities to revive infrastructure, legislation on these issues never emerged.

Why is this? To some extent, Trump had to navigate the same institutional obstacles that challenge all new presidents, but he came to the task with less patience, less sophistication, and a less competent staff than his predecessors, and with a mass base that was remarkably indifferent to the twists and turns of his policy decisions. Far earlier than those predecessors, he turned to aspects of the job that were less encumbered with the need for technical expertise and political savvy: rhetoric, executive rule-making, secret dealing, and politically-inspired pardons. Unable to stop opponents from publishing criticism of his administration, he had to satisfy by trying to delegitimize them—and the mass media more generally. Such efforts produced stalemates, at best, not victories, and they came at the cost of the coherence of the administration's policies.

## ***5.2 Seizing and Making Opportunities***<sup>18</sup>

At least as much as its policies, the Administration's rhetoric has been a boon to the Resistance, which has been extraordinarily successful in mobilizing opposition to it; its efforts were likely critical in stopping the repeal of the Affordable Care Act in 2017 and

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<sup>18</sup> See Gamson and Meyer (1996) and Tarrow (1996) for this distinction.

in forcing the administration to re-unite the families it had separated at the border, or at least to make a show of doing so. But more fundamentally, the Resistance has been successful in using America's inherited institutions to create opportunities for itself.

Take the near-monarchical institution of the presidential inauguration: in the face of the assembling of Trump's supporters in Washington, DC to celebrate Trump's inauguration on January 20th, 2017, a coalition of his opponents was able to bring together an enormous turnout against the newly-elected President the following day, both in the nation's capital and around the country (Berry and Chenoweth 2018). That "Woman's March" was sparked by outrage over the new President's disparaging attitude to women, but its members' claims went far beyond feminist claims (Fisher 2018). From a quickly constructed "event coalition", the Women's March grew into a loosely-linked organization that continued to fuel participation at a series of other protest events with participants and organizational leadership.

Dana Fisher's studies of movement events in Washington from January 2017 through to the "March for Our Lives" in June 2018 lend support to this model. Fisher (2019) found large majorities of female participants at these events (also see Putnam and Skocpol 2018). This was followed by a massively attended "March for Science," a "People's Climate March," a "March for Racial Justice," and a second Women's March in January 2018. The timeline in Figure 1, reproduced from Fisher's work, lays out only the nationally-oriented protests that followed Trump's election that she surveys. But as the work of Erica Chenoweth and Jeffrey Pressman's crowd-sourced archive shows, these Washington events were only the barest minimum of a wave of protest events – both national and local – that continued through the first two years of the Trump presidency.<sup>19</sup>

Following a tried-and-true American practice, almost immediately, a major segment of the Resistance organizations turned to the routes of influence afforded by the founders, particularly, the midterm elections two years away. This was a political opportunity that both radicals and moderates on the Left knew they had to seize. The midterms produced a surge of women candidates and supporters across the country. According to the New York Times:

...progressive candidates running outsider campaigns powered by strong personal narratives and women's activism that began with massive marches the day after President Trump's inauguration and has grown through protests

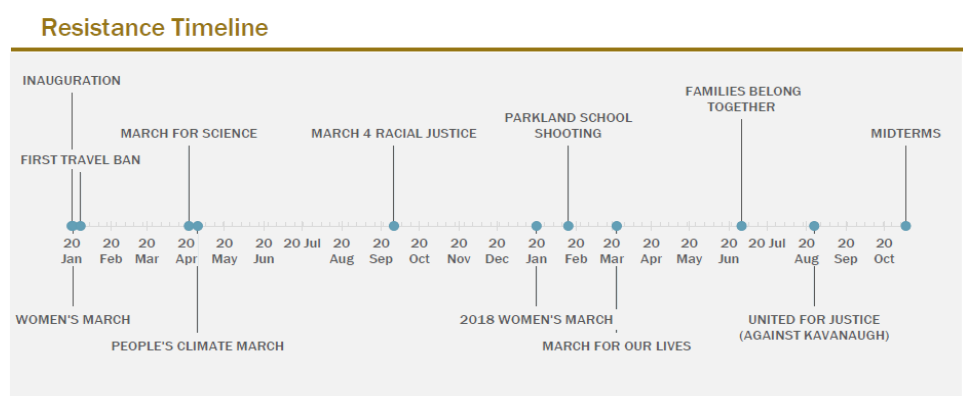
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<sup>19</sup> Chenoweth and Pressman's findings can be found at their website "The Crowd Counting Consortium," at <https://sites.google.com/view/crowdcountingconsortium/home>.



against gun violence, the stripping away of the Affordable Care Act and immigration policies that divide candidates.<sup>20</sup>

Figure 1 - Major Nationally-Oriented Protest Events, January 21, 2017-November 6th, 2018



Source: Dana Fisher, "Some Updates on American Resistance."

<http://americanresistancebook.com/2018/03/07/some-updates-on-american-resistance/> November 7th, 2018.

As of mid-November, 2018, 235 women had won primaries for election to the House and 22 to the Senate, breaking a record set in 2012, of which 102 won their contests. Not only that: 130 candidates of color won primary contests, of whom 45 won their contests, as did 158 first-time candidates, of whom 35 won their seats.<sup>21</sup> Table 1 summarizes the congressional data for total numbers of women who filed, and who won or lost primary elections, and the total number who ran in the midterm elections in November, 2018. We present the primary data because these are most likely to have tapped into the new women's militancy that grew out of the women's march.

The mobilization in the streets and the new movement-oriented candidacies for office energized and radicalized the political base of the Democratic Party. Moreover, social movement activists, ranging from former Clinton supporters to Indivisible to the young gun control crusaders from Florida all focused their efforts squarely on the midterm elections. Their energy, underscored by provocations from the Oval Office, pro-

<sup>20</sup> Kate Zernike, "Hope Mixes with Caution in a Year Women are Breaking the Rules," *New York Times*, June 30th, 2018, p. A11. <https://nyti.ms/2lC2Hlu>.

<sup>21</sup> Schneider, data as of September 11, 2018, in <https://www.politico.com/story/2018/09/11/white-men-democratic-house-candidates-813717>. Final figures are from <https://www.politico.com/interactives/2018/women-rule-candidate-tracker/>

duced record financial contributions to Democratic candidates for office, mostly through numerous small donations.<sup>22</sup> Democrats brought young people to the polls in record numbers, mobilizing ethnic and racial minorities as well.<sup>23</sup> Even more impressive were the number of women who won their congressional elections – as many as 113 in the House, beating the number of successful women candidates in the “Year of the Woman” of 1992.

**Table 1 - Women Candidates in the 2018 Midterm Elections, by Chamber and Status**

U.S House*		
<b>Total Filed to date**</b>	476	356D, 120R
Lost Primary	231	164D, 67R
Won Primary***	235	183D, 52R
Likely candidates not yet filed	--	--
Total still in the running	237	185D, 52R

U.S Senate		
<b>Total Filed to date**</b>	53	31D, 22R
Lost Primary	30	16D, 147R
Won Primary***	22	15D, 7R
Likely candidates not yet filed	--	--
Total still in the running	23	15D, 8R

Source: Center for American Women and Politics, “2018 Summary of Women Candidates,” October 21, 2018. <http://cawp.rutgers.edu/potential-candidate-summary-2018>.

- In New Mexico and Kansas, two Native American women won seats in Congress in traditionally Republican states;

<sup>22</sup> Michelle Ye Hee Lee and Anu Narayanswamy, “Despite record spending, 2018 midterms highlighted limits of campaign cash,” *The Washington Post*, November 7. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/despise-record-spending-2018-midterms-highlighted-limits-of-campaign-cash/2018/11/07/4ded1e34-e12e-11e8-ab2c-b31dcd53ca6b\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.ac7064709137](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/despise-record-spending-2018-midterms-highlighted-limits-of-campaign-cash/2018/11/07/4ded1e34-e12e-11e8-ab2c-b31dcd53ca6b_story.html?utm_term=.ac7064709137).

<sup>23</sup> Ella Nilsenella, “Youth turnout this year is surpassing 2014 levels on several college campuses,” VOX, November 6, 2018. <https://www.vox.com/2018/11/6/18069962/youth-turnout-2018-midterm-election-college-campuses>

- In Michigan and Minnesota, Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar became the first Muslim women to serve in Congress;
- In New York and Iowa, the two youngest women ever elected to Congress took their seats;
- In deep-red Texas, Veronica Escobar and Sylvia Garcia became the state's first two Latina congresswomen
- In Massachusetts, Ariana Pressley became that state's first black congresswoman.<sup>24</sup>

But the visible energy of the ascendant Democrats inspired Trump's supporters to turn out in great numbers as well. The result was an increased polarization and purification within each party in the areas of its strength. Although the bargain of higher turnout and greater civic engagement across the political spectrum is better for Democrats in general, it is not unambiguous or cost-free. Conservatives and nationalists see a political threat and are responding, at the polls, in legislatures, and, most disturbingly, in the streets.

Although the Democrats made electoral gains, to translate that electoral passion into policy, they face not only their opponents, but also the institutional obstacles the Founders built into the Constitution. The first is the Electoral College, which delivered the presidency to Donald Trump when the popular vote did not—despite the best efforts of his political opponents. The second is the misappropriation of seats in relation to population in the Senate, whereby a state like North Dakota, with a population of just over 755 thousand, has the same number of Senators as California, with close to 40 million. The third is the practice in the vast majority of states that allows state legislators to determine the boundaries of election districts, which permitted Republican legislators, who gained control of a majority of states in 2010, to “gerrymander” minorities and Democrats into districts in which their weight in the voting population would be dispersed.<sup>25</sup> As a result, even large Democratic electoral majorities can result in state legislatures and a US Congress dominated by the Republicans.

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<sup>24</sup> <https://www.buzzfeednews.artical/juliareinstein/historic-firsts-from-the-midterm-elections>.

<sup>25</sup> Redistricting has always been politicized in the United States, but recent advances in algorithmic computing have allowed partisan experts to precisely draw district boundaries in ways that “waste” the votes of opposition voters. For a brief analysis, see C.A. Newkirk, “How Redistricting Became a Technological Arms Race,” *The Atlantic*, Oct. 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/10/gerrymandering-technology-redmap-2020/543888/>.

Effective engagement in these elections also requires Democrats to be sensitive to the vast political differences and interests of the large republic that Madison envisioned. Thus, an electable Democrat in North Dakota or Montana must be far more sympathetic to the interests of energy extractors and gun owners than the base of the political party, and the successful insurgent candidate in an urban district who emphasizes racial justice will be a prime target of Republican opponents across the country.

Promises that mobilize an activist base, such as fixing the immigration system or providing national health care or reforming the tax system, stumble on the shores of political institutions designed to accommodate diverse interests without satisfying any of them. Importantly, the promises that mobilize the opposition to Trump, most notably the chimera of impeachment, are virtually impossible to achieve within the rules and institutions of American politics.

## **6. The coalitional challenge**

Countermovements are generally composite affairs, and the anti-Trump movement is, if anything, more composite than most because of the breadth and diversity of its constituents and their concerns. But does this breadth and diversity translate into a dispersed range of campaigns or into a cohesive coalition that centers on the outsized figure of its major target – Donald Trump?

Some students of coalition formation see “crisis” as a catalyst for cooperation, and if that is true, the conditions are arguably right for an anti-Trump coalition to succeed. But Trump’s tendency to rapidly shift from one policy attack to another may impede activists’ capacity to combine different movement sectors (Reese, Petit and Meyer 2010). Much will depend on the presence and capacities of inter-movement brokers to build bridges between these sectors and to fashion movement frames that transcend the interests and values of single sectors (Van Dyke and McCammon 2010, 202-3; Obach 2010, 202-3; Rose 2000).

Even before Trump’s inauguration, women, environmentalists, immigrant rights advocates, scientists, lawyers, supporters of health care, ethnic and racial minorities – began to organize to oppose the assault on rights and regulations they expected to be coming (Fisher 2018). As the enormities of the Trump presidency became clear, pre-existing groups, like Black Lives Matter and the LGBT movement, began to merge with the new groups that emerged from the election. Among the most surprising was the rise of a national movement of – of all things! – teenaged high school students, follow-

ing the shootings of 17 of their fellow students and teachers in Parkland, Florida.<sup>26</sup> These young survivors of a mass shooting in a relatively affluent and well-funded school district made a concerted effort to mobilize their anger and experiences to change policy and influence turnout in the midterm elections. Savvy in the use of social media and supported by a well-resourced community, they commanded national attention, organized a large demonstration in Washington, DC, and then set out to target the National Rifle Association and politicians whom it supported.

A second strand of contention – the #MeToo movement – arose independently of Trump in the outrage over the sexual harassment of women by Producer Harvey Weinstein and other public figures. This too merged with the anti-Trump movement, first, in response to the new President's history of denigrating women, and then during the Senate hearings over the nomination of Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court. At this writing there are court cases in process on the part of a number of women – like adult film producer Stormy Daniels – against the President. (Here too, there were contradictory effects, since many conservative voters, convinced that the Democrats were using the accusations of sexual abuse against Kavanaugh for electoral purposes, claimed to have turned out to vote Republican in the midterm elections as a result.)

The emerging Resistance had two main organizational conduits: new groups, like Indivisible, that were formed out of ad hoc initiatives (Brooker 2018); and older ones, like the American Civil Liberties Union, that had been working for progressive causes for decades. This dichotomy could already be seen in the heterodox composition of the Women's March. As Hahrie Han and Michelle Oyakawa write: "From groups like Swing Left to Flippable, Wall of Us to Indivisible, and People Power to Daily Action, the counter-mobilization spawned a host of new networks, apps, and organizations" (2018, 231), many of them local and forming independently of the more visible national organizations (Putnam and Skocpol 2018).

The shock of Trump's election also prompted a cascading set of responses by existing advocacy organizations that felt their agendas under attack in a new way (Putnam and Skocpol 2018). Indeed, the march was supported by a spectrum of existing organizations, ranging from the electorally-oriented Emily's List, to progressive trade unions like the SIEU, and the powerful civil liberties group, the ACLU. The convergence was mirrored at the local level too: "Many women sitting on local civic organizations, associations, and governing boards," write Marie Berry and Erica Chenoweth, "also provided organizing capacity and experience that would prove crucial in organizing sister

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<sup>26</sup> Audra Burch and Patricia Mazzei, "Death toll is at 17 and Could Rise in Florida Shooting," *New York Times*, Feb. 14, 2018. [www.nytimes.com/2018/02/14/us/parkland-school-shooting.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/14/us/parkland-school-shooting.html).

marches in the coming weeks” (2018, 79). Even lawyers, whose activism is normally limited to the courtroom, emerged as prime actors in the Resistance, from their defense of refugees at airports around the country in response to Trump’s travel ban in early 2017 (Dorf and Chu 2018) to fighting family separation at the border in 2018.

Should we see the varied strands in the Resistance as an integrated movement or as a scattered array of diverse interests and claims? The major gravitational source that pulled the varied strands of the Resistance together was Trump and his continual assaults on immigrants, minority communities, the environment, and on the international rule of law. Trump offers these groups a focal point that keeps the varied elements of the resistance from careering off in different directions. But the very unpredictability of his initiatives can have an opposite effect: no sooner does a policy of his administration offer opponents a unifying target – for example, the separation of children from their illegally-immigrating parents in June, 2018 – then Trump marches off in a new direction — like his embrace of Vladimir Putin at the Helsinki summit soon afterward.

Much depends on the intersection of varied forms of activism and on how new and old groups manage their relations. When Fisher (2019) compared her survey of the Women’s March to other post-inauguration protests, the results showed hints of intersectionality. She writes that

People who were motivated by Racial Justice to participate in the March for Science reported being motivated by LGBTQ issues and Police Brutality; and people who were motivated by Racial Justice to participate in the People’s Climate March reported being motivated by Equality, Brutality, Religion and Social Welfare.<sup>27</sup>

In their work on Latino mobilization, Chris Zepeda-Millán and Sophia Wallace found a similar duality. They argue:

Because of the Trump administration’s simultaneous attacks on various marginalized groups, the president may be creating opportunities for the immigrant rights movement to forge more productive and meaningful intersectional and cross-movement alliances” (2018, 103).

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<sup>27</sup> Quoted from Fisher, “American Resistance,” 2019, in press. However, when Fisher analyzed the durability of intersectional overlaps, she found that “the patterns are not durable across events, indicating the limitations of interpretations of the Resistance as a unified intersectional movement” (Fisher, Jasny, and Dow 2018, 1).

These authors also found that groups organizing on behalf of the rights of African-Americans, such as the Black Lives Matter movement and the NAACP, have increasingly also advocated for immigrant rights. “Groups such as the National Women’s Law Center have also developed resources and called for actions to protect the rights of immigrant women”, they write (2018, 105).

The challenge of maintaining some kind of unity among people who bring to their activism strong commitments to diverse issues is a major challenge. Likely the greater challenge, however, is to maintain a connection between the movement’s institutional and non-institutional wings. Much of the energy of the latter comes from young people, former Sanders supporters, and racial minorities outraged at continued police brutality. These groups often find it hard to ally with Democrats and non-profit groups that are more comfortable within the institutions of government and in mainstream politics. But that party can only win if it succeeds in holding onto a broad following, ranging from its solid African-American and Hispanic bases, to suburban middle-class independents turned off by the volatility of the Trump phenomenon, to working-class voters who are hit by the costs of his trade policy and grow skeptical of populist campaign slogans that don’t lead to meaningful reforms. This takes us to the final challenge faced by the Resistance –what we call “the radicalization/institutionalization challenge.”

## **7. The Challenge of Radicalization and Institutionalization**

As social movements develop, and particularly as they demonstrate signs of political influence, they are subjected to centrifugal pressures that lead the diverse factions that comprise a campaign to become more diverse and diffuse, focusing on distinct projects at the expense of unity. The American political system works to exacerbate such disputes (Meyer 1993). The result is a bifurcation that often reinforces polarization between radicalization and institutionalization within a movement. Each move by one actor in a contentious conversation leads to an equal, or even more extreme move, often exacerbated by the indiscriminate reaction of the forces of order. Thus, after the protests of antiwar activists at the Chicago Democratic convention were brutally suppressed by Mayor Daley’s police in 1968, some activists moved into a violent and clandestine underground. “Chicago,” argues Todd Gitlin, “confirmed that no centers were going to hold, no wisdom was going to prevail” (1987, 326). Similarly, the intense clashes between police and protesters in Italy in 1968-69 led militant minorities to hive off into clandestine groups that chose the route of armed struggle (della Porta and Tarrow 1986).

The shift of thousands of activists into campaign activity during the 2018 midterm elections, while more outraged activists continued to protest in the streets and in the halls of Congress, provides a similar challenge. Most of the Resistance has been peaceful – in its public actions if not always in its rhetoric. But while many of the newly-elected Democrats in Congress are moderates, the radical wing of the Resistance that helped to elect them may push them to overreach their fragile power.

First, supporters of the Sanders candidacy, many of them convinced that their candidate was cheated out of the Democratic nomination by the Clinton forces, came out of the 2016 election spoiling for a fight, and tried to instill a radical current into the emerging Resistance. It also led to success in the victory of candidates like 28 year old democratic socialist Alexandria Osorio-Cortez in a New York City primary.

Second, in Washington, DC, Berkeley, California, and Portland, Oregon, small radical elements used the Inauguration to mount attacks and engage in vigorous, and sometimes violent, encounters with police (Berry and Chenoweth, 85). This “antifa” movement clashed with the ultra-nationalist and openly racist right in Charlottesville, Virginia, in August, 2017, when an extreme nationalist group tried to organize a rally to oppose the removal of a local statue of General Robert E. Lee, a hero of the Confederacy in the Civil War. When a group of anti-fascist demonstrators showed up to oppose the rally, this led to violent clashes between the opposing groups. The episode ended when a radical rightist, James Alex Fields Jr., plowed his car into a group of counter-protesters, killing a young woman, Heather Heyer, and wounding several others.<sup>28</sup> The Charlottesville episode had immediate and longer-term political repercussions: immediate, when President Trump opined that “there were good people on both sides,” and longer-term, when it led a number of other southern cities to remove statues of Civil War heroes.

Third, during the conflict over the Kavanaugh nomination, thousands of women and others demonstrated against the Republicans’ attempt to force a compromised judge through Congress and produce a takeover of the Supreme Court. Those demonstrators were largely peaceful and polite –in the tradition of American women’s organizing – but their passion and their willingness to flood the halls of Congress allowed the GOP

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<sup>28</sup> Sheryl Stolberg and Brian Rosenthal, “Man Charged After White Nationalist Rally in Charlottesville ends in Deadly Violence,” *New York Times*, August 17, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/12/us/charlottesville-protest-white-nationalist.html>.



and the president to portray them as advocates of “mob rule,” – just as Richard Nixon did in his presidential campaign.<sup>29</sup>

But alongside radicalization there was an opposite result: the movement of larger – if less volatile – sectors of the movement into parties, interest groups, and the movement press. There is a long history of sociological theorizing – beginning with Michels’ work on political parties (1962), and Zald and Ash’s landmark work on movement organizations (1966) that focuses on the process of “goal displacement”, in which an organization survives at the expense of the issues that initially gave rise to it. Indeed, we often see a high degree of displacement of radical goals in the latter stages of a protest cycle; but we also see a thrust of reformism coming from activists who have entered institutional frameworks. This is what happened within the Democratic Party following its disastrous national convention in 1968 that led to a tragic defeat at the polls months later (McAdam and Kloos 2014, ch. 4).

It is far too soon to judge whether the Resistance will have a similar long-term effect on party politics, but as the 2018 midterm election approached, we already saw the influence of progressive groups on nominations to Congressional and state-level office. Figure Two, which is taken from a New York *Times* compilation of primary election endorsements, shows that groups like the Justice Democrats, Our Revolution, the Working Families Party and the Progressive Change Campaign Committee have helped progressive candidates – many of them women – to enter, and often to win -- primary elections against more traditional Democrats.

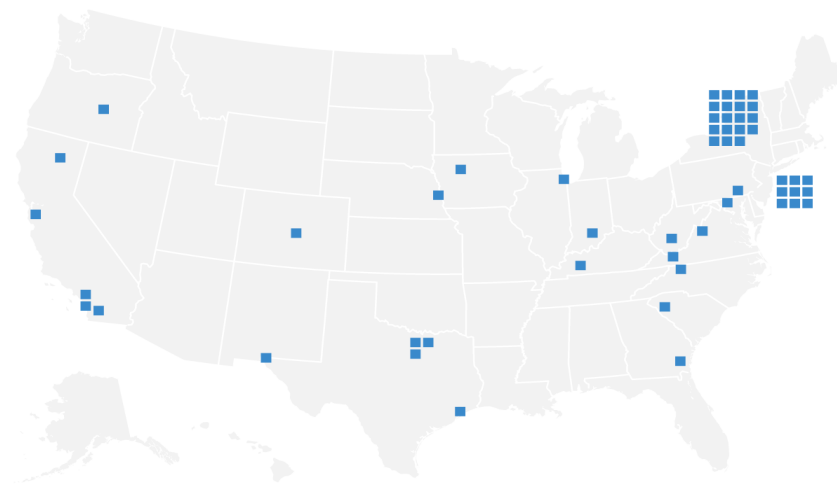
But opposing a popular president with his major support from a movementized Right will require a broader coalition, stretching from the progressive forces that came out of the Sanders campaign to the mainstream activists who supported Hillary Clinton. A revitalized Democratic Party could inspire those who envision something akin to a European Social Democratic or even Socialist Party, one that would support a strong welfare state and organized labor. But it terrifies others who envision exactly the same sort of party or, worse, undergoing defeat at the polls. The dilemma for the Democratic Party is whether to encourage the progressive currents in the Resistance that are trying to move the party to the left, or reach out to independent voters – especially suburban women – who are distressed at the outrages of Donald Trump and are looking for a

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<sup>29</sup> The parallel between these two episodes, and the tactic of portraying demonstrators as “a mob,” are ably analyzed by historian David Greenberg in “The Time a President Stoked a Protest So He Could Play the ‘Law and Order’ Card”, *Politico*, October 27, 2018, <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2018/10/28/nixon-protest-law-and-order-221920>.

new home in institutional politics. The competing tendencies of institutionalization and de-institutionalization that emerged from Trump's election have both entered the American party system.

**Figure 2 - House primary winners endorsed by at least one major insurgent group**



Source: Candidates endorsed by the Justice Democrats, Our Revolution, the Working Families Party and the Progressive Change Campaign Committee; Associated Press. | Note: Special elections are not included. Race ratings are an average of ratings by The Cook Political Report, Inside Elections With Nathan L. Gonzales and the University of Virginia's Center for Politics. From Alexander Burns, "There is a Revolution on the Left; Democrats are Bracing," The New York Times, July 21, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/21/us/politics/democratic-party-midterms.html>

## 8. Conclusions

Analyzing political contention on the fly, all conclusions must be provisional. We can do somewhat better with explaining the conjunction of forces and events that led to this moment than we can in predicting the ultimate outcome. The nationalist movement Trump represents and encourages, and the Resistance it provoked, are unlikely to reach a conclusion as tidy and succinct even as the outcome of the 2018 midterm elections, which were ambiguous enough! Although the major story following those elections was the dramatic shift towards the Democrats in many parts of the country, there was also a countervailing shift to the right in election districts that had supported

Trump two years earlier. The 2018 elections may have marked a long-term shift to the left, but – for the moment – it reinforced the polarization of American politics.<sup>30</sup>

The Trump phenomenon, we have argued, is best understood as a social movement, which gives Donald Trump enormous leverage within the Republican Party, which had initially accepted him as its leader with reluctance. That movement, we then argued, gave rise to a countermovement – the Resistance – which is locked into a sustained battle with its Trumpian counterpart. Trumpism is like European populism in some ways but it has behind it a half century of movementization at the base of the Republican Party, whose main source is the racial resentment of white voters at the real and imagined disadvantages they suffer at the hands of minorities and those who represent them. Trump went further than any Republican politician in exploiting these grievances, but he did not invent them.

Trump's control of one of the two national parties means that the Resistance faces a double challenge: opposing a mobilized population at the base of the Republican party who maintain a direct relationship with its leader, and that party itself, which is fast becoming the institutional face of the movement. This double challenge has created two faces of the Resistance: the face that contests the excesses of Trumpism in the streets; and the face that contests Republican gains in the institutions of American politics. The first was the visible face of opposition during the first two years of the Trump presidency; the second is the face that opposed him in the midterm elections. How those two "faces" relate to each other is the major challenge of the opposition to the Trump presidency.

Growing out of this central dilemma, the Resistance faces a number of specific challenges: how to handle the mix of opportunities and constraints that the American system offers insurgent groups; how to manage a broad and heterogeneous coalition; and how to mediate between the conflicting peaks of institutionalizing and de-institutionalizing actions. The American system both facilitates the creation of such coalitions at the gates of institutional politics (Tarrow 2012) but throws up enormous obstacles to their success (Meyer 2015).

This leads us to a final question: "What is the future of the citizen groups that were politicized by the election of Donald Trump and by the challenges his administration has created?" Here again, we are in the realm of speculation, but a look at the recent American past suggests that this will not prove to be a "flash movement" that fritters away its energies in endless debates or disappears into private life. Previous large epi-

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<sup>30</sup> See the interactive map of the 2018 elections in the *New York Times*, November 8, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/11/07/us/politics/how-democrats-took-the-house.html>.

sodes of contention, including the civil rights, antiwar, and antinuclear movements led to narratives of frustration and burn-out, to be sure, but they also produced large numbers of people who were determined to find new and sustainable ways to advance their views (Corrigall-Brown 2012). If we focus only on the continuing street demonstrations, their relative size, frequency, and civility, we will be missing a great deal of the action, which can only occur in the medium and long runs.

Already, the apparently successful shift of Resistance energy from mass rallies to town hall meetings and electoral politics suggests that the movement is adding an institutional face to the dramatic street protests of 2017. In normal circumstances, Democratic gains would lead to efforts at compromise and conciliation, moderating some of the worst Trumpian excesses and chilling the ardor of the mainstream Republicans who grabbed hold of his coattails after his early successes. Such a restoration is unlikely in the near future.

It is a mistake to imagine a quick end to the extremely polarized politics and political divisions that characterize the Trumpian and anti-Trumpian moment. The forces that Trump exploited and those that he conjured up are unlikely to disappear with his presidency. Encouraged and legitimated not only by the president of the United States, his supporters and enablers in positions of power across the country are as unlikely to give up in the face of defeat as is the Resistance. White nationalism, largely marginalized in past decades, has reemerged as a force that future governments will have to manage. Demographic changes may well defeat these forces at the polls, but we've learned that it doesn't take majorities to influence the political agenda.

We can imagine a future in which a revitalized Democratic Party, energized by the Resistance, develops the determination to use whatever means it can muster to achieve its policy goals, much as Trump's Republican Party has done. This will make for a messy and divisive politics, in which institutional battles about politics and policy are punctuated by street demonstrations and social divisions. We can also imagine an alternative, in which electoral victories from the Resistance encourage defections within the Republican Party, and a reinvigorated respect for the institutions of government. Neither course is inevitable—or easily dismissible.

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